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Kennan Stresses Depth of Forces Shaping World Events

A friend of mine who knows a good deal about the American people and their reactions said something to me the other day which helped me personally to orient myself in this situation which, I ask you to believe, has not been an easy one for any of us in the Department of State, whether or not we have been personally attacked. This friend said, "You may be sure that these charges would not have proved so disturbing to people out around the country if there were not in their minds some great doubts and questions about American foreign policy which have not yet been answered to their satisfaction. Things have not gone in accordance with their hopes or their expectations, and they want to know the reasons why. If it has not been because the State Department has been full of Communists, then they want to know what the real reason is."

Pre-war Lack of Understanding

It seems to me that in the field of foreign affairs there is generally a great time lag—as much as five or ten years on the average—between cause and effect in major developments. This is something that few people in this country are aware of. Their unawareness expresses itself in a demand for quick results, where such results often simply cannot be obtained. It also expresses itself in a tendency to lay the blame or credit for current developments on people who happen to bear public responsibility at the moment, even though the real causes of these developments may go much deeper in time and in complexity.

I believe that some of our difficulties in

understanding this situation result from misunderstandings which existed even prior to the last war. It seems to me that in the thirties we were, as a nation, not sufficiently aware of the role which power

U.S. Policy Under Review

George F. Kennan, Counselor of the Department of State and former chairman of its Policy Planning Committee, delivered an address on "Current Problems in the Conduct of Foreign Policy" at a meeting of the Institute on United States Foreign Policy sponsored by the Foreign Policy Association of Milwaukee, the Milwaukee Vocational and Adult Schools and the University of Wisconsin Extension Division, on May 5, 1950. Salient portions of that address are published in the adjoining columns because of their special relevance to the discussion on problems and prospects of American foreign policy currently being conducted in the *Foreign Policy Bulletin*.

was coming to play in this world of ours, and particularly in the minds of three extremely vigorous and important peoples—the Germans, the Russians and the Japanese.

During the decade preceding our participation in the second World War, that is from 1931-1941, it was plain that these countries were all in the hands of governments which would have no respect for liberal principles or ethical restraints in their conduct and would be motivated pri-

marily by power considerations. It was also evident that these three countries in combination possessed, or would soon possess, a military potential clearly overshadowing anything that could be mobilized elsewhere on the Asiatic and European continents. In other words, by the latter part of the thirties the preponderance of world power was already against ourselves and our friends and it could be reasonably predicted that if our sort of world were to survive it would be only by virtue of the rifts among the totalitarian powers, not because we and our friends were strong enough to oppose all of them together and all at once.

We did not realize how profound and fateful a change would be made in the world picture when, with the war fought to the finish of "unconditional surrender," two of these totalitarian states would be laid prostrate and disarmed while the third would be left in possession of great areas of Europe and Asia. We did not fully realize that this would create a situation in which it would be a hard and dangerous and wearisome task to restore life on these continents except with Russia's consent and on Russia's terms.

This was a serious misunderstanding we were wandering into. For the power of the free world had not really been enhanced during the war. On the contrary, the German and Japanese occupation of other countries had dealt great, if temporary, blows in many instances to their capabilities for the independent reassertion of their national power. The experience of totalitarian occupation had not only left people everywhere with a nation-

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al hatred of those who had occupied them; it had also left another and more fateful imprint. This was a widespread doubt about the principles of that liberal non-totalitarian world which had failed to save them from the catastrophe of occupation, and had liberated them only after years of suffering and degradation and, in some instances, of tragic human losses.

I am not saying that the war could or should have ended differently than it did. Hindsight is too easy; and we are not helped, in our present bitter problems, by the boastful claims of "I told you so" even in those rare instances where they might have some justification. I am saying that the shape of this post-war world, with all its dangers and its insecurity and its lack of easy solutions, was largely cut out for us by the course of military events during the recent war, when we were very little aware of that fact. And the policies by which those military events were determined were ones which found the concurrence and approval of the overwhelming majority of our people. Let us be fair, then, and recognize that in this great turning in human affairs which has led to our problems of today we are dealing with something for which we all have a share of responsibility. And let us therefore look for its causes not in the possible deficiencies of a few contemporary figures, but rather in the great tragic sweep of the events of our time.

China Controversy

This was not the only fateful source of misunderstanding about our present problems. There is China and the Far East. No sector of our policy has been the cause of so much criticism as this.

The state of mind which lies behind this criticism is roughly this: China has fallen to the Communists. That is a reversal to the cause of world peace and stability. Therefore, our policy must have been wrong. Therefore there must have been something wrong in the State Department.

That all sounds plausible enough; and it would be—if China were a sort of province of the United States and if the State Department ran it and if it were the State Department which had decided that the Communist party should be the faction which would have the best morale and discipline and pack the strongest political punch and win the civil war in China.

But suppose none of this were so. Suppose that our representatives had warned

the Chinese government earnestly and repeatedly of the probable consequences of the course on which it had embarked; suppose that when these warnings were ignored, there was nothing more that our government could really do to influence or alter the basic course of events in China; suppose that the troubles of the Chinese government were inherent within itself; suppose that it wasn't in the first instance lack of money or arms or anything this country could give which stood between the Chinese government and the accomplishment of its purposes in China; suppose we were given the impression that the reason that government wanted aid from us and paid people in this country to lobby for that aid was not so much that it really wanted to overcome its weaknesses, but in order that it might more easily avoid having to face up to them, not so much that it wanted to increase its efforts, but rather because it wanted to involve us to the point where we would take over the major burden of the responsibility and it could itself relax and sit back; how would things look then?

These happen to have been the realities, and they can be very easily proven from the published documents.

What would people have had the State Department do in the light of this situation of fact? Would they have had us beat our breasts and recommend United States intervention in China to prove that we were good anti-Communists? I wonder how many of you realize what that really means. I can conceive of no more ghastly and fateful mistake, and nothing more calculated to confuse the issues in this world today than for us to go into another great country and try to uphold by force of our own blood and treasures a regime which had clearly lost the confidence of its own people. Nothing could have pleased our enemies more. Yet this is precisely what this country would have been led into by further involvement along the lines of military aid and advice; and I look back with pride on the fact that people in our government, in the State Department and elsewhere, had the good sense and the courage to resist the flamboyant and emotional appeals for action in this direction. Had our government been carried away by these pressures, many of which had their origins in the interests and activities of a foreign government, I am confident that today the whole struggle against world communism in both Europe and Asia would have been hopelessly compromised.

As it is, we have lost a battle, and yielded what appeared to be a position. I have never believed that it was a sound position, or a defensible one. What has happened in China is bad, and we have no reason to feel smug about it. But with the departure of the last party of American officials from Tientsin we have gotten rid of our last official entanglement in that unhappy area. We are now on the road to a relationship with China which will be expressive of our high regard for the Chinese people but unencumbered by past involvements and illusions.

Now if these things are so, why is it that we have had so much misunderstanding and so much bitterness in this country about this course of events? I am sure that the answer to that question lies to a large extent in the shallowness and over-simplification of our understanding of what has been happening in China.

Dangers of Internal Rifts

It may be asked: "If the situation in China was so black, why were we not told this earlier?" The answer is: these things *were* said, many times over, as clearly as they could be said by our government without running the risk of misinterpretation and direct damage to the Chinese government. Remember that we could not talk about these things to our own people without being overheard in China, and too much emphasis on the disturbing conclusions which had to be drawn would itself doubtless have hastened the disintegration of the power of the Chinese government. We in Washington were already under such strident and bitter attack from protagonists of the Chinese government that if we stressed this point too much we were sure to be accused by them of defeatism, and charged with the responsibility for that very trend of events in China which we were being forced to view as inevitable. Perhaps this course was wrong; however that may be, its motives were serious and worthy ones. Again, I would point the moral. If the atmosphere of public discussion is to be too harsh, too intolerant, too abusive, this is going to decrease rather than to increase the possibilities for a frank and helpful exposition of government policy to the public at large.

Now it was with the misapprehensions I have spoken about that large numbers of our people entered the post-hostilities era. Since then, things have progressed in ways that have now led quite naturally to

deep questions in many people's minds. Recent events, namely this final collapse of the power of the Chinese government on the mainland of China, and the demonstration of a Soviet atomic capability, have given to many people the impression that we are losing what they call the cold war; and to others, who may not see things quite that blackly, these events have brought doubts and questions as to whether our policies are adequate, whether we have really thought things through, and how, if present policies are continued, these things are going to end.

In my own opinion the dangers and difficulties that confront the Western world from without, as distinct from those that confront it from within, are not appreciably greater today than they have been at any time since the termination of hostilities, and there is no reason that they need be fatal to our cause. Things have gone relatively well, by and large, in Europe, and relatively badly in Asia. But neither in Europe nor in Asia has there been any finality about any of these events. The situation in both places is still fluid, and highly subject to rapid change in our favor or our disfavor. I believe that the basic lines of the policy which we have pursued in these past three years have been pretty well prescribed for us by the limits of what was possible and practicable, and that they could not have been much different than they were without putting us worse off today than we actually are.

Now I am not going to tell you that we have made no mistakes or that we have been everything that we should be. I am not going to tell you there has been no problem of security, that there have been no Communists or Communist agents in the government, although I think that is something the significance of which has been overrated in relation to our other problems.

What I want to urge is only this: that we recognize the profundity of the foreign policy problems with which we are faced today; that we recognize the depth in time and space of the origins of those problems; and that we are not misled into the easy conclusion that the dangers and challenges and dilemmas of our world situation are the product of the mistakes or the ill will of any individuals who bear responsibility at this moment for the conduct of foreign affairs.

I urge this first for the sake of the individuals concerned. The responsibilities borne by these men who have to conduct

foreign affairs in this country are neither light nor easy, and the sort of service which they are rendering to the government has few personal compensations. We are not rich, strange as it may seem to some of you, in men both qualified and available to take these positions. The strains under which our leading officials work leave them a very slender margin of physical and spiritual energy to absorb abuse and derision from the people for whom they conceive themselves to be working. I must tell you that the atmosphere of public life in Washington does not have to deteriorate much further to produce a situation in which very few of our more quiet and sensitive and gifted people will be able to continue in government.

Current Attacks Alarming

I view this situation with deep alarm. The margin of safety with which our country moves in the world today is not great enough to permit us to be reckless and wasteful with the talents and the idealism of those people we depend on for the generalship of our peacetime battles.

The second reason that I urge this on you is that it is not fair to yourselves and the great body of citizenry of which you are a part. If you permit yourselves to attribute to contemporary causes which are shallow and fleeting and of dubious substance, developments which are in reality part of the cumulative effect of the behavior of whole peoples and groups of peoples in the past, you will be abusing your clarity of insight into the realities of this world. In the past, our fortunate geographic position and our immense resources have enabled us to take in our stride great and widespread errors of judgment—errors not just on the part of our leaders but errors on the part of all of us together. We have been able to afford in many instances to believe in that which was pleasant rather than in that which was real. Today we can no longer afford this luxury. If our system of government is to continue to rest on the basis of popular understanding and popular will, then we must learn as a nation to face unflinchingly the lessons of experience, to recognize the true causes of our difficulties, to free ourselves from a morbid introspection and to turn our minds in unity and confidence to the objective problems that lie before us.

Perhaps only someone who has lived for many years in totalitarian countries

can feel as strongly as I do how vitally important it is to us to preserve the spirit of tolerance and liberality in our relations with each other and the readiness to give the other fellow the benefit of the doubt, where doubt exists. These things lie at the heart of our civilization. They are essential to free inquiry, to the scientific method as we know it, and to our own special form of creativeness. But they are also essential to the preservation of our national identity and to our entire claim to world leadership. If our enemies without can force us to abandon the spirit of tolerance by frightening us with their agents inside our country, then they will have bypassed the Maginot line of our society, they will have seized its citadels from within and we on the firing line will have been left with nothing to defend.

Believe me, there is something more involved here than just the guilt or innocence, the folly or the wisdom, of any of us who today bear the responsibility for the formulation of United States foreign policy. I do not deny that those things are at issue, too; and I am aware of the heavy connotations of that fact. But there is something greater still that is also at stake: and that is the question as to whether a country, as Lincoln expressed it, "so conceived and so dedicated" as our own, can meet the responsibilities of national maturity in a world bewildered by its own past violence and haunted by the shadows of its own disunity.

GEORGE F. KENNAN

Branch and Affiliate Meetings

HOUSTON, May 22, *Dinner in honor of His Excellency Liaquat Ali Khan*

PROVIDENCE, May 22, *World Trade Luncheon*, Willard L. Thorp; *Forum on Imports and Exports*, Charles A. Richards, David Nopper

MILWAUKEE, May 23, *Our Problems in the Far East*, Rudolph E. Morris

NEW ORLEANS, May 23, *Pakistan Today*, His Excellency Liaquat Ali Khan

SPRINGFIELD, June 1, *Frontiers of U.S. Foreign Policy*, Brooks Emeny

The Ramparts We Guard, by R. M. MacIver. New York, Macmillan, 1950. \$3.00.

A stimulating series of essays, by the author of *The Web of Government*, originally delivered as the Weil Lectures at the University of North Carolina, in defense and definition of democracy, combined with an exposition of the perils that confront the democratic system from without and from within.

French Steel Plan Opens Debate on Europe's Economy

While Parisians sipped their pernod, strolled in the Tuileries, window-shopped in the Place Vendôme and on the great boulevards, or worked at their jobs—all thankful for the indescribable beauty and joy that is springtime in Paris—an historic announcement on May 9 from the Quai d'Orsay startled the entire world. The French government proposed joint control of the entire French-German production of coal and steel within an organizational framework open to the participation of other European nations.

So bold and daring—and also so vague—was this suggestion that most responsible officials the world over hesitated to do little more than laud the sentiment that impelled France to reverse its post-war policy and seek an economic *rap-prochement* with Germany. Despite the absence of specific techniques designed to implement the proposal, certain observations can be made about the economic aspect of the pool plan.

Intent of the Proposals

A glance at a resource map of Europe reveals that the raw materials required for an efficient steel industry are not distributed in conformity with national boundaries. One ton of finished steel requires, on an average, three tons of iron ore, two tons of coal and over one ton of other raw materials, including scrap and fluxes. Each of the twelve steel-producing countries—thirteen if the Saar is counted separately—is at least 45 per cent dependent on other European nations for one or more of the three necessary ingredients. Especially complementary are the French iron-ore deposits in Lorraine and the coal reserves of the Saar and Germany. It was this situation which led the Economic Commission for Europe to conclude in 1949 that “concerted action by all countries involved seems necessary . . .”

The French say that “conditions will be progressively created which will automatically insure the most effective rationalization of production on the basis of the highest level of productivity.” The increased efficiency secured through joint control would be translated into reduced

prices and would redound to the benefit of the entire world, especially the underdeveloped areas. It is further hoped that trade barriers impeding the free flow of steel would disappear and that working conditions in the industries would be equalized and improved. It would seem like caviling to be less than enthusiastic about these hoped-for economic gains—the more so because of the French claim that a political by-product of the plan will be to make war between France and Germany “unthinkable.” Yet several questions have been raised about the plan both here and in Europe.

Unanswered Questions

How can the desired economic integration be attained when France's coal industry is nationalized and its steel industry is not, while the ultimate disposal of German industries remains to be decided at some future date? How much significance should be attached to the fact that the Conservatives in Britain—inveterate opponents of steel nationalization at home—are “sold” on the plan? Is it merely fortuitous that the Association of German Iron and Steel Manufacturers are “wholeheartedly in favor of the French plan” while German trade unionists and Socialists are markedly cool? Was it by pure accident that Chancellor Konrad Adenauer mentioned Robert Pferdmenges, Cologne banker and noted Nazi supporter, as the type of person who would serve on the joint technical commissions?

Paris maintains that the pool will be unlike a cartel. The French insist that rather than restrict output and divide world markets the new organization will seek to expand production and fuse markets. While increased output is patently urgent now, there seems to be little assurance that the over-all authorities will not countenance restrictive practices should a future market situation bring falling prices. A study of the price policies of the pre-war international steel cartel—where all participants except the American had the backing of their respective governments—reinforces rather than allays this fear.

Clarification Needed

Can coordinated management of such a huge enterprise result in real internal and external economies of production? American steel experience indicates that the inability of management to handle excessively large business units acts as a brake on the gain in efficiency that can be achieved by concentration. The United States Steel Corporation has gone so far as to break up various subsidiaries and follows an internal policy of stimulating competition as a means of maximizing efficiency.

Is the French plan to be a prelude to raising officially the annual limit on German steel production of 11.1 million tons? An increase in the output potential of German industry may be a very sound idea—if it is part of a consistent policy that seeks the maintenance of peace and the improvement of living standards. But how can acceptance of Germany as an equal partner in a steel combine—the very sinews of war—be squared with the Allied decision on May 8, the fifth anniversary of Germany's defeat in World War II, to ban German rearmament and guarantee that its industry remain demilitarized?

French sources report that the pool plan must be considered together with Premier Georges Bidault's proposed Atlantic High Council. The pool suggestion, they contend, represents an attempt to make the United States and Britain realize that genuine integration is bound to enhance Germany's power and must, therefore, be accompanied by suitable political measures.

Any step in the direction of genuine economic cooperation is desirable. All attempts to ease and remove Franco-German tensions are laudable. Every proposal, however, must be subjected to critical scrutiny in order to insure that the wisest policies will be accepted. The French will probably, in the near future, disclose some concrete plans to implement the suggested pool which, it is hoped, will deal with some of these queries.

HOWARD C. GARY